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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/132, the present report reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to enable the well-being of women and girls in rural areas, especially the poorest and most marginalized. Gains in this area are essential for progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to ensure that no women or girls in rural areas are left behind in its implementation, monitoring and results achieved (see Assembly resolution 70/1). Recommendations are provided for consideration by the Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 70/132 on improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it on the implementation of the resolution at its seventy-second session. The present report provides an assessment of the situation of women and girls in rural areas since the seventieth session, emphasizing considerations that address both women and girls, given that the resolution highlighted girls in rural areas for the first time. It highlights the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to address challenges facing women and girls in rural areas, especially the poorest and most marginalized, and to enable them to improve their lives and livelihoods through: (a) equal access to quality education; (b) quality, affordable and universally accessible health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; (c) the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination; (d) access to sustainable and time- and labour-saving infrastructure and technology; (e) increased labour market participation and decent work, including for young women; and (f) the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics in rural areas. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.[1]

2. The Beijing Platform for Action addresses rural women and girls across the 12 critical areas of concern.[2] In strategic objective F, on women in the economy, for example, attention is drawn to the promotion of women's economic rights and independence, and to key linkages between women's economic empowerment and women's voice, agency and decision-making in the private and public spheres. It highlights policies and strategies to improve the situation of rural women producers, increase their incomes and provide household food security. The 20-year review of the implementation of the Platform in 2015 brought renewed attention to the need to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' empowerment and rights in rural areas (see E/CN.6/2015/3).

3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women remains the only international human rights treaty with a specific article, article 14, on the situation of rural women, although all rights under the Convention apply to rural women.[3] It calls on States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women in a number of areas. In its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, their rights to land and natural resources are emphasized and it is explicitly recommended that States uphold rural women's rights to health, education, employment, housing, water, sanitation, energy and participation.

4. Although general recommendation No. 34 focuses on rural women and girls in developing countries, it is also relevant for developed countries: rural communities

[1] A note verbale was circulated to all Member States and a letter was transmitted to United Nations entities soliciting contributions to the present report. Replies were received from 38 Member States (Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, China, Colombia, Cuba, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nepal, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Switzerland, Togo and Turkey) and from 5 United Nations agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), whose contributions have been incorporated into the report.

[2] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

in developed countries may be adequately connected to services and infrastructure for the most part, but there are disparities among them. It recognizes that rural women in both developing and developed countries grapple with poverty, economic and political exclusion, lack of access to services and social protection and the concomitant increases in domestic and care work, and rural development policies that overlook the priorities and rights of women. In particular, many women migrant workers in developed countries are employed in agriculture and often face serious human rights violations, including violence and exploitation, and are denied access to basic services. Widespread industrialized agriculture in many developed countries has marginalized small farmers, with a disproportionate impact on rural women farmers (see general recommendation No. 34).

5. Assessment of the situation of women and girls in rural areas must take into account evolving globalization, rapid technological and digital innovation, growing migration within and between countries, expanding urbanization, increasing climate change impacts, emerging humanitarian crises and political and violent conflicts, and greater demands for food. Poverty and undernourishment have been reduced globally but unevenly, while economic inequality in developed and developing countries has increased notably.[4] This global scenario may offer possibilities of new markets, expanded entrepreneurship and new livelihoods in the agrifood sector and beyond, but for individual rural women and men the risks and barriers remain significant.[5]

6. The crucial role that women and girls play in ensuring the sustainability of rural households and communities and improving rural livelihoods and overall well-being, has been increasingly recognized. Women account for a substantial proportion of the agricultural labour force, including that engaged in informal work, and perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work within families and households in rural areas. They make significant contributions to agricultural production, food security and nutrition, land and natural resource management and to building climate resilience.[6]

7. Even so, women and girls in rural areas suffer disproportionately from multidimensional poverty.[7] While extreme poverty has declined globally, the 1 billion people in the world who continue to live in unacceptable conditions of poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas. Poverty rates in rural areas across most regions are higher than those in urban areas. Yet smallholder agriculture produces nearly 80 per cent of food in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and supports the livelihoods of some 2.5 billion people. Women farmers may be as productive and enterprising as their male counterparts, but are less able to access land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets and high-value agrifood chains, and obtain lower prices for their crops.[8]

8. Structural barriers and discriminatory social norms continue to constrain women's decision-making power and political participation in rural households and communities. Women and girls in rural areas lack equal access to productive resources and assets, public services, such as education and health care, and infrastructure, including water and sanitation, while much of their labour remains

[4] www.oecd.org/social/inequality.htm.

[5] IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering Inclusive Rural Transformation* (Rome, 2016).

[6] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

[7] Multidimensional poverty refers to the overlapping deprivations that poor women and men face in terms of health, education and standard of living. The 2014 Multidimensional Poverty Index, covering 105 countries, showed that 85 per cent of those living in multidimensional poverty live in rural areas.

[8] IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation*.

invisible and unpaid even as their workloads become increasingly heavy owing to the outmigration of men. Globally, with few exceptions, every gender and development indicator for which data are available reveals that rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women, and that they disproportionately experience poverty, exclusion and the effects of climate change.[9]

9. The gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, natural disasters and post-conflict situations can intensify existing gender inequalities in rural areas. Health risks and water and fuel scarcity related to climate-induced disasters add to the unpaid care and domestic work performed by women and girls. Women and girls are particularly affected by changes in the availability and quality of resources during and after conflict. It is increasingly evident, however, that rural women and girls are also at the forefront of building resilience and adapting to climate change, as well as contributing to post-conflict economic recovery.[10]

10. Rural women and girls are characterized by multiple and intersecting identities and inequalities; their circumstances vary according to, inter alia, location, income, age, race/ethnicity, culture and religion, violence and discrimination, disability status, migration status and refugee or internally-displaced person status. This complexity influences their decision-making power and exercise of voice and agency and defines their access to land, productive resources and household assets, as well as to food security and nutrition and education and health services. Specific groups, such as indigenous women, women heads of household or migrant women, may have particular needs and priorities, thus requiring policy and institutional responses that address this diversity with tailored approaches.

11. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms the crucial importance of gender equality as both an integrated means and a goal of its implementation. With its interconnected and mutually dependent goals and targets, the 2030 Agenda represents a comprehensive and transformative agenda for rural development and the empowerment of rural women and girls. The 2030 Agenda states that Member States will devote resources to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, supporting smallholder farmers, especially women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries (General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 24). The implementation of the framework constitutes an unrivalled opportunity to achieve gender equality and realize the rights and empowerment of women and girls in rural areas.

II. Empowerment of women and girls in rural areas

A. Equal access to quality education

12. Educating women and girls is at the heart of sustainable development and gender equality, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Despite the gains made in achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment in developing countries, much remains to be done to reach universal primary completion. The ambition to achieve gender parity in school is offset by persistent gender-based discrimination and stereotypes in relation to textbooks, curricula, teaching methodologies, access to infrastructure, including information and communications technologies (ICT) and practices and behaviours within and outside educational

[9] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security* (Rome, 2016), p. 49.

[10] UNEP, *Global Gender and Environment Outlook* (Nairobi, 2016).

settings, all of which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas.[11] Of particular concern with regard to rural girls is the persistent and widespread lack of qualified teachers in rural areas, especially in connection with the preparation, recruitment and retention of women teachers.[12]

13. The poorest girls are at the greatest risk of exclusion from school. In essence, poverty and location are the factors that determine whether girls go to school. Poor rural young women tend to be significantly less literate than the rural average; in the majority of countries with data, less than half of poor rural women have basic literacy skills. In Pakistan, the literacy rate for poor, young rural men is 64 per cent, compared with 15 per cent for their female counterparts.[13]

14. In lower-income countries, basic educational attainment is linked with increased incomes and better livelihoods among rural and informal sector workers. Poverty continues to be the main determinant of inequality in education. Among young people between the ages of 20 and 24 in 101 low- and middle-income countries, the poorest quintile averaged 5 years less schooling than the richest quintile, with a 2.6-year difference between those from rural and urban locations, and slightly more than a year's difference between women and men.[14] However, the multiple and intersecting identities and inequalities involving rural women and girls put them at the greatest disadvantage in terms of schooling, literacy and adult education. Indigenous women in Latin America are twice as likely to be illiterate as non-indigenous women. In Nigeria, over 90 per cent of adolescents from rich households were likely to complete lower secondary education, while only 17 per cent of poor rural young men and a mere 3 per cent of poor rural young women did so. In Brazil, 9 per cent of poor rural men complete lower secondary school, double the rate of their female counterparts.[15]

15. Member States have taken measures to achieve equal access to education for girls and women in rural areas and to address gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece and Turkey. Sri Lanka and Indonesia have established 12 years of free and compulsory education. As a result, in Sri Lanka gender parity has been virtually achieved with a participation rate in 2014 for girls of 98 per cent and that for boys slightly higher, at 98.8 per cent. In Indonesia, scholarships or conditional cash transfers are provided for students from poor families, which has kept both girls and boys in school with the additional benefit of reducing child labour. An education social welfare card guarantees all children and young people (aged 6-21), especially girls, access to education in various forms, be it public, religious or vocational.[16]

16. Various States have provided lifelong learning opportunities or second-chance education to rural women and girls. The Ministry of Education in Mongolia is encouraging women, including rural women, of all ages to enrol at "life-long

[11] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016. Education for People and Planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All* (Paris, 2016); UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016: Gender Review* (Paris, 2016).

[12] Jessica Gallo and Paula Beckman, eds., "A Global View of Rural Education: Issues, Challenges and Solutions Part II", *Global Education Review*, vol. 3, No. 1 (2016).

[13] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016. Gender Review* (Paris, 2016).

[14] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016. Education for People and Planet*.

[15] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016. Gender Review*.

[16] Conditional cash transfers should be designed to benefit both women and children. Some schemes may not empower women because they pose trade-offs between children's and women's needs and tend not to address gender and generational inequalities within the household. See Maxine Molyneux, "Conditional cash transfers: a pathway to women's empowerment?" Pathways working paper 5 (Brighton, United Kingdom, Pathways of Women's Empowerment, 2009).

education centres." Togo has created 7,500 literacy centres and 250 village libraries nationwide, with emphasis on rural areas, so that women can apply literacy in agricultural activities and daily life. In 2016, the Ministry of Women and the Family of Djibouti launched a literacy programme in national languages, targeting rural women and girls who have not had the chance to go to school.

17. Cultural and ethnic minorities are often marginalized in access to education in rural areas. The Slovak Republic concluded an innovative education project for primary school teachers, on "Intercultural Education in Elementary Schools with Pupils from Roma Communities". The Public Education Secretariat of Mexico prioritizes women and girls in rural areas, in particular those from indigenous groups. In 2014 and 2015, over 13,000 basic education scholarships were awarded to young indigenous women, in 2015 and 2016, over 1,000 to women speaking indigenous languages, and, in 2016, support went to over 277,000 women at university, including nearly 75,000 indigenous women. The Sudan aims to reduce gender disparity and increase the rate of girls' educational participation, with a focus on nomads and displaced persons.

18. Attention has also been paid to ensuring equality of opportunity for young women, including from rural areas, in tertiary education. Universities in Ethiopia provide meals and accommodation for all students. Support from Norway to the Universities of Mekele and Awassa covers basic essentials that poor, rural women students cannot afford. In the academic year 2016-2017, 1,338 women students, most from poor, rural, smallholder households, received such support.

19. Evidence shows that the provision of school meals can increase enrolment and reduce absenteeism, especially for girls. In 37 countries, the World Food Programme's home-grown school meals provide healthy, diversified and nutritious meals to children in schools, sourced locally from smallholders, including women, thereby encouraging farmers to produce quality food and increasing their market access.

B. Quality, affordable, universally accessible health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights

20. At least 1 billion people worldwide, especially in rural areas, do not have access to a qualified health professional.[17] Distance from health facilities is a serious cause for concern for rural women, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the least developed countries, a rural woman is 38 per cent less likely than an urban woman to give birth with the assistance of a skilled health professional.[18] Maternal deaths, which are largely preventable as the necessary medical interventions are well known, are linked to inadequate health services for women, particularly for poorer women and women living in rural areas. In 2015, about 830 women died every day because of pregnancy or childbirth complications. The maternal mortality ratio was, per 100,000 live births, 239 in developing countries, 12 in developed countries, and 216 globally. Sustainable Development Goal target 3.1 calls for a reduction to fewer than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.

21. The lack of information and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights is particularly acute for rural women, especially young women. Globally, the unmet need for family planning affects the lives of 214 million women in

[17] UNESCO. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016: Education for People and Planet.*

[18] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

developing countries.[19] Combined with limited decision-making power, mobility and financial resources, early marriage and pregnancy have serious impacts on adolescent girls' educational and health outcomes.[20] In one recent survey of 1,381 young rural women (aged 15-24) in Jharkhand, India, the mean age of marriage was 15.7 years and 53 per cent had had their first child by the age of 17.[21]

22. Globally, AIDS remains a leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. In 2015, women represented 51 per cent of all people worldwide living with HIV and 59 per cent of those living in sub-Saharan Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa in 2015, young women and adolescent girls accounted for 66 per cent of new infections among young people. Globally, only 3 in 10 girls and young women aged 15-24 have comprehensive and accurate knowledge about HIV.[22] Owing to gender inequalities, rural women, especially young women, are more vulnerable to the risk of HIV.[23] Discriminatory laws and customary practices that limit or deny women's rights to land, property and inheritance place rural women at heightened risk of HIV infection and undermine their ability to seek care, cope with the consequences of illness and care for themselves and their families.[24] Those living with HIV depend on the unpaid care work of women and girl family members for support and care; in rural Nigeria, over 90 per cent of the care for those ill with HIV is provided by women, including girls of 10 years of age and above.[25]

23. Member States have made significant strides in addressing maternal and child health in rural areas. The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Programme is a nurse-led home visiting programme that supports women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child to improve their and their babies' health. The Australian Government invests in a network of 140 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to deliver culturally appropriate comprehensive primary health care. In 2015 and 16, these services delivered approximately 3.9 million episodes of care, of which 26 per cent were in very remote and 18.2 per cent in remote locations. Mexico has a specific programme of action for maternal and perinatal health to improve the quality of obstetric care. In 2016, budgets were allocated to recruit indigenous language translators, in 16 indigenous languages, in hospitals for pregnant women. Informational materials on maternal and perinatal health and adolescent pregnancy were produced, targeting indigenous peoples. To address maternal mortality, the Ministry of Health of Peru has established birthing centres in collaboration with local communities and governments: 439 of the planned 459 centres had been established by 2016 in Amazonian and Andean rural areas.

[19] World Health Organization (WHO), Family Planning/contraception fact sheet 2017. Available from www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs351/en/.

[20] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Ending child marriage: progress and prospects" (New York, 2014).

[21] Sushanta K. Banerjee and others, "How prepared are young, rural women in India to address their sexual and reproductive health needs? A cross-sectional assessment of youth in Jharkhand", *Reproductive Health*, vol. 12, No. 97 (2015).

[22] Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) AIDSInfo, available from http://aidsinfo.unaids.org; UNAIDS, "On the fast-track to end AIDS by 2030: focus on location and population" (2015).

[23] Sophie J. S. Pascoe and others, "Poverty, food insufficiency and HIV infection and sexual behaviour among young rural Zimbabwean women", *PLOS One*, vol. 10, No. 1 (January 27, 2015). Available from https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0115290.

[24] MEASURE Evaluation, "The links between women's property and inheritance rights and HIV in rural Tanzania" (March 2017). Available from https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/fs-17-206/.

[25] Ekaete Francis Asuquo, Josephine B. Etowa and Margaret I. Akpan, "Assessing women caregiving role to people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, West Africa", *SAGE Open*, January-March 2017, pp. 1-10.

24. Sri Lanka has free universal health care for all, including health services accessible to all women. Rural and urban disparities in delivery are minimal, reaching at least 98 per cent of both urban and rural women, and maternal mortality rates declined to 31 per 100,000 live births in 2013. In El Salvador, 21 maternity waiting homes were established, allowing timely access to hospital delivery for pregnant women in remote areas, and the Women's City (*Ciudad Mujer*) programme provides health services, including sexual and reproductive health, to rural women. In Cuba, maternity homes care for rural pregnant women in coordination with rural communities, guaranteeing delivery by specialized personnel and offering preventative treatment for nutritional disorders, low birth weight and reproductive, obstetric and perinatal risks. In Poland, as of 1 January 2016, social insurance for farmers covers maternity allowances and the current 52-week period has been extended to up to 71 weeks for multiple births or adoption.

25. States covering sexual and reproductive health in national health programmes and strategies to raise awareness and provide information include Argentina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Indonesia, Mexico, Poland and Sri Lanka. According to the Cambodian Ministry of Health, the use of modern contraceptive methods increased from 19 per cent in 2000 to 38.8 per cent in 2014, with higher use among rural women than urban women. The family planning and contraception programme (2013-2018) in Mexico helps women and men to enjoy their sexual and reproductive lives in an informed, free, satisfactory, responsible and risk-free manner, while reducing unmet demand for contraceptive methods, especially among adolescent, indigenous and rural populations.

26. States are deploying mobile clinics to reach rural women. In Saudi Arabia, mobile clinics provide services, including early detection of breast cancer, to rural women in remote areas. In China, "Healthy Mother Express" mobile medical vehicles provide services to women and children in deprived areas. By the end of 2016, 2,470 vehicles were operating and had benefited 50 million people; 60 million rural women had undergone free cervical cancer screening and 80 million rural women had received free breast cancer screening. The National Women's Federation's Mothers from Deprived Areas Cervical and Breast Cancer Support Fund provided support for 71,396 women from rural areas suffering from these diseases.

27. Some countries employ telemedicine to reach rural women. The General System of Social Security for Health in Colombia guarantees quality, affordable and accessible health services to the entire population, including rural women. The country promotes telemedicine as a means of overcoming geographical access barriers in remote areas with dispersed populations. In 2015, Mongolia, with support from Luxembourg, implemented the Telemedicine Project, which provided 203 pregnant women in remote areas with expert consultations in their own communities, thereby avoiding the costly trip to the capital city. Skills of rural health-care professionals were upgraded through e-learning, including high-quality, up-to-date sexual and reproductive health care.

28. A number of Member States, including Cambodia, Colombia, Cyprus, El Salvador, Mexico, Romania and Sri Lanka, conduct national information campaigns on the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. It is acknowledged that comprehensive knowledge of the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS needs to be strengthened among adolescents and young people, including in schools — such as the model for preventing HIV/AIDS through educational communities in El Salvador. Countries are targeting services to at-risk populations, including women in the sex industry and migrant women. In Mexico, universal free treatment coverage for HIV/AIDS has been achieved.

C. Elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination

29. Violence against women and girls is a significant issue in all countries. Over one-third of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence by a non-partner, at some point in their lives; in most countries, less than 40 per cent sought help at any point.[26] Situations of heightened conflict, instability and migration have been marked by high levels of sexual and gender-based violence. Yet no current published global or regional data on violence against rural women exist. Only partial assessments can be made; for example, of the 46 countries with recent data on physical or sexual violence committed by a husband/partner in the last 12 months, 26 showed higher rates in rural than in urban areas.[27] Women and girls in rural areas may be at increased risk of violence because of structural causes — greater multidimensional poverty, legal and customary discrimination and lack of access to land, productive resources, decent work and social protection — as well as negative social norms and behaviours of men and boys. For rural women and girls who have suffered violence, services for survivors are not easily available and accessible in rural areas. In situations of domestic violence, for example, lack of childcare or employment opportunities can exacerbate rural women's lack of access to basic support services (see E/CN.6/2012/4).

30. The practices of child, early and forced marriage have declined globally, but some 15 million girls annually are married before they reach 18 years of age, many belonging to the poorest households in rural sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Girls in rural areas are more likely to become child brides than their urban counterparts worldwide. In some countries in West and Central Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, child marriage in rural areas is about twice the level in urban areas.[28] Similarly, female genital mutilation/cutting is still practised in at least 29 developing countries, affecting an estimated 200 million women and girls, 44 million under 15 years of age. In 19 of the 29 countries the practice is more common in rural areas. Of those aged 15 to 49 years who have heard about female genital mutilation/cutting, 67 per cent of women and girls and 63 per cent of men and boys think the practice should end.[29]

31. Member States, including Argentina, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Chad, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Greece, Indonesia, Jordan, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, the Slovak Republic and Sri Lanka, have passed national legislation or launched national action plans, strategies or campaigns to combat violence against women. In Chad, on 12 December 2016, the National Assembly adopted the revised penal code, which includes provisions to reduce gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

32. States have taken measures to prevent, combat and respond to violence against rural women and girls. In Sri Lanka efforts to eliminate violence against women are concentrated in rural areas, where 60 per cent of incidents occur. Domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, incest, assault and forced prostitution are the most common offences reported. Six rural shelters were set up for survivors of violence and centres established in 40 major hospitals to provide medical care and counselling, with trained staff. In 2016, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia

[26] *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.8), chap. 6.

[27] UN-Women calculations based on data from the Demographic and Health Surveys programme STATcompiler. See http://www.statcompiler.com/en/ (accessed May 2017).

[28] UNICEF, "Ending child marriage: progress and prospects".

[29] UN-Women assessment. Available from https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation-and-cutting/ (accessed June 2017).

and Herzegovina introduced a budget for grants to non-governmental organizations to combat gender-based violence; in September 2016, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Ministry launched a project to prevent and combat domestic violence against women in 10 local governments, including in rural areas. In Mexico, women's justice centres provide psychological, legal and medical care and temporary shelter; there are currently some 35 centres in 24 states, including in rural communities. Several initiatives promote a culture of non-violence in indigenous communities, given the degree of physical violence, sexual violence and discrimination that indigenous women face. Support for 189 projects against violence in rural areas benefited 32,557 people, of whom 20,892 were women. In Colombia, a national tour on challenging stereotypes of violence is an innovative violence prevention initiative using theatre and art to highlight everyday situations that have become normalized but actually constitute violence against women.

33. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed Guidance on the Prevention and Mitigation of Gender-based Violence to assist its staff and partners in designing and delivering food security and nutrition policies and actions that minimize risks to recipients, working with communities, particularly men and boys, to address practices that contribute to gender-based violence. FAO also brings men and women together to work on domestic violence, early marriage and HIV/AIDS. The Safe Access to Fuel and Energy approach is aimed at reducing the risk of violence to rural women and girls while collecting fuelwood. In some cases, women and girls who were victims of violence are no longer excluded from community life and have found the courage to report cases of rape and seek health advice; young girls have regained their dignity by going back to school. WFP school feeding programmes also provide a platform for conducting awareness-raising on gender equality and gender-based violence.

D. Access to sustainable infrastructure and technology

34. Infrastructure and technology tend to reach rural women and girls last, even if vital for relieving their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work and enhancing their economic opportunities. This situation is obscured by the lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics in key sectors, such as energy, water and sanitation and ICT. Global electrification reached 85.3 per cent in 2014 and close to universal access has been achieved in urban areas, at 96 per cent, while rural areas lag behind at 73 per cent of the population. This means that over 1 billion people still do not have access to electricity, the vast majority in rural areas, in particular rural sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Global access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking reached 57.4 per cent in 2014; those lacking access to clean cooking are mainly in rural sub-Saharan Africa and Asia-Pacific.[30] Thus 3 billion people, mostly in rural and peri-urban areas, continue to rely on women and girls collecting solid fuels (i.e., wood, crop wastes, charcoal, coal or dung) and cooking over open fires and dirty stoves, exacerbating time and energy poverty and household air pollution. In 2012, exposure to such household air pollution caused 4.3 million deaths worldwide, 60 per cent of them women and children.[31]

35. Lack of clean water and safe sanitation also remain important causes of death, with an estimated 871,000 associated deaths in 2012, disproportionately in poor

[30] International Energy Agency, World Bank, "Sustainable Energy for All 2017: Global Tracking Framework — progress toward sustainable energy" (Summary) (Washington, D.C., 2017).

[31] WHO, *World Health Statistics 2017: monitoring health for the Sustainable Development Goals*.

communities and among children under 5 years of age. However, more than 90 per cent of the world's population has access to improved water sources (84.6 per cent in rural areas); nearly 68 per cent has improved sanitation (50.3 per cent in rural areas); and the proportion of people practising open defecation was down to 13 per cent in 2015. Those who lack improved water sources and sanitation facilities and practise open defecation are primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. The poorest people in rural areas suffer most from lack of access to water, especially the women and girls who are responsible for collecting it. Rural women and girls are also disproportionately affected by the lack of clean, safe and private sanitation facilities. Monitoring under Sustainable Development Goal 6 on universal access to water and sanitation has changed from assessment of "improved/unimproved" water sources to "safely managed" water services.[32] Although 6.6 billion people had access to an improved drinking-water source in 2015, the availability of safely managed drinking-water remains low, with preliminary estimates of 68 per cent in urban areas and only 20 per cent in rural areas.[33]

36. Global connnectivity has been facilitated by the more than 7 billion mobile phone subscriptions, the 2.3 billion people with smartphones and some 3.2 billion people connected to the Internet, including 1.3 billion women users. Increased Internet connectivity and mobile phone access are credited with spurring women's entrepreneurship in many countries, including in rural areas. Even so, gender gaps exist: over 3 billion people in low- and middle-income countries do not own mobile phones, and 1.7 billion of them are women. Cost is the most important barrier to owning and using a mobile phone, particularly for women in rural areas of Southern Asia, East Asia and the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa. A worldwide gender gap of 12 per cent in Internet use was found in 2016, with a gap of 30.9 per cent in the least developed countries.[34] Even as mobile technology becomes prevalent, the digital divide is focused on the remaining 3.9 billion people who are offline — predominantly rural, poorer, less educated women and girls.[35]

37. Member States are making progress in supplying rural communities with the necessary infrastructure and technology to alleviate unpaid care and domestic work performed by women and girls. Argentina, Australia, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Egypt, Mexico, Poland and Sri Lanka are focusing on clean drinking water. In Sri Lanka, women are involved in planning and implementing 3,500 community-managed rural water supply schemes providing water to 3.5 million people; piped water is available in 44 per cent of rural areas. Cuba installed more than 3,000 aqueducts, windmills and water pumps, which guarantee chlorinated drinking water in 3,500 rural communities and provide employment for women. The "Water for All" project in Argentina reaches 371 Guaraní families, of which 171 are represented by women and 200 by men, to expand the water supply system for multiple use. Among rural women in Slovenia, Roma women are particularly

[32] Improved drinking water sources have the potential to deliver safe water. Safely managed drinking water should be accessible on premises, available when needed and free from contamination. See Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and Sustainable Development Goal Baselines* (Geneva, WHO and UNICEF, 2017).

[33] WHO, *World Health Statistics 2017: Monitoring Health for the Sustainable Development Goals*; http://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/SDG-06-clean-water-and-sanitation.html; Zachary Burt, Kara Nelson and Isha Ray, *Towards Gender Equality through Sanitation Access*, UN-Women discussion paper No. 12 (New York, 2016).

[34] ITU, *Measuring the Information Society Report 2016* (Geneva, 2016); GSMA, Connected Women, "Bridging the gender gap: mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries" (2015).

[35] ITU and UNESCO, *The State of Broadband 2016: Broadband Catalyzing Sustainable Development* (2016).

disadvantaged since many Roma families still live without electricity or running water: improving Roma housing conditions continues to be a national priority.

38. States are supporting sustainable energy for gender equality in rural areas. Norway is supporting Ethiopia to promote household renewable energy. Some 33,000 fuel-saving stoves have been distributed and 115,000 households (22,000 headed by women) are using climate-smart technology packages. FAO has distributed an estimated 41,000 fuel-efficient stoves and provided training on their production and use in Cameroon, Kenya, South Sudan and the Sudan, targeting women and girls. Sri Lanka aims to provide universal access to affordable, reliable, high-quality energy. In 2013, 78 per cent of households in Sri Lanka used firewood collected by women for cooking; therefore, the Ceylon Electricity Board introduced energy-efficient cooking stoves. Low-income families can access loans at 7 per cent interest to cover the costs of connecting to the grid, payable with their electricity bill over six years.

39. States are providing rural women with access to ICT. Sri Lanka is increasing digital literacy in school curricula and establishing e-libraries, resource centres and public access points in rural areas; women constitute two-thirds of public access point users. Australia has committed to the rollout of the National Broadband Network by 2020, improving access to high-speed broadband services across regional, rural and remote areas. The "Live Digital kiosk" programme in Colombia provides community Internet access points for children, youth and adults in remote, rural communities with more than 100 inhabitants. Nearly 7,000 kiosks provide rural women with basic ICT skills that they can apply in their work. In China, "Internet +" has increased the number of practical e-commerce education and training opportunities available to rural women. The International Telecommunication Union has developed training materials to promote rural women's ICT literacy, in partnership with the Asia Pacific Women's Information Network Center and with support from Australia.

E. Rural women's labour market participation

40. Women's employment in agriculture has declined over the most recent two decades, but it continues to be the most important source of employment for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Globally, a quarter of all working women were involved in agriculture in 2015, comprising over 40 per cent of agricultural workers. In Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, over 60 per cent of all working women are in agriculture. By contrast, the share of women in agriculture is only 9.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries and 2.6 per cent in high-income countries. In many developing economies, women are concentrated in time- and labour-intensive agricultural activities, which are unpaid or poorly paid. Both women and men have lower than average earnings in rural areas and, in absolute terms, rural women are at the bottom of the earnings ladder. Gender discrimination and occupational segregation perpetuate the gender wage gap and inhibit upward mobility for rural women workers and labour force entry for young women. The pay gap between men and women performing the same work in agriculture or rural employment can be as high as 40 per cent. Rural women workers face decent work deficits such as low-paid, unskilled, poor-quality jobs, lack of formal contracts, inadequate social protection, widespread underemployment, absence of the right to work and rights at work and constraints

on the right to organize. Labour legislation is often not enforced, and rural workers are the least organized and the least protected.[36]

41. Agricultural and rural non-farm employment and enterprises are both critical for rural development and the livelihoods of rural women workers of all ages. Rural women's enterprises and cooperatives need support to access markets, for example, to be suppliers for public and private procurement systems, school feeding programmes and other public or private services. Governments can help to create enabling environments for low-income self-employed rural women, small-scale farmers and rural women's enterprises and cooperatives by improving access to productive resources and financial services, including credit, procurement schemes, training and skills development and agricultural extension services. Governments can also increase labour and social protections for rural women workers, in particular younger and older women and those from marginalized and migrant communities.[37] For instance, Italy passed legislation in 2016 to protect migrant workers against illegal recruitment and labour exploitation in agriculture and to provide social protection and access to justice.

42. Several Member States support women's entrepreneurship in rural areas, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. In the Russian Federation, women head a third of agricultural enterprises. In Georgia, a programme to support micro and small enterprises in regional areas has awarded 36 per cent of funded projects to women entrepreneurs since 2015. El Salvador, together with Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua, participates in the "Expanding Economic Opportunities for Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Latin America" programme, supported by UN-Women and the International Fund For Agricultural Development (IFAD). With support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), El Salvador also launched the "Decide to grow campaign: combating gender stereotypes in vocational training and employment." The Micro Enterprise Development Programme of the Government of Nepal is aimed at reducing poverty through entrepreneurship, employment and access to decision-making for rural women from poor, Dalit and indigenous communities.

43. Member States are promoting rural women's economic independence. Cuba reports an increasing number of women in agricultural cooperatives, with women holding most financial and management positions. Collective land rights have been granted to some 20,000 women, together with full access to credit and technical assistance, allowing women to manage their landholdings. The General Directorate for the Regulation and Development of the Banking System of Sudan has mandated that 30 per cent of resources allocated to rural areas should finance women. The agricultural extension network of Mozambique has offered assistance to producers in rural areas throughout the country, supporting 634,345 producers in 2016, of whom 308,686 are women, by way of 1,371 extension agents, of whom 227 are women. Qatar reports that women participate in all private and public employment in the country, since men and women have equal employment opportunities. The "Telework" programme of Saudi Arabia allows rural women to work from their regions. Mongolia is promoting employment, including for herders; women benefit from over 40 per cent of the jobs created. The Policy on Pension Reform

[36] ILO, *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva, 2016); Marzia Fontana and Cristina Paciello, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty — A Global Perspective* (Rome, 2010); IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation*; FAO, "Rural employment guidelines material #1: Guidance on how to address rural employment and decent work concerns in FAO country activities" (Rome, 2011).

[37] ILO, *Women at Work: Trends 2016*.

(2015-2030) allows women aged 50, who have worked for up to 20 years (of which 12.6 years as herdswomen) and paid pension insurance premiums, to qualify for old-age pensions.

44. FAO is working to strengthen the capacity of agricultural practitioners in member countries to understand and address discriminatory attitudes towards women in rural employment and support the realization of their rights. In March 2017, FAO published an e-learning module to improve stakeholders' understanding of gender disparities in rural labour markets and strengthen their abilities to implement employment strategies that boost rural women's access to decent jobs and increase their ability to profit from agricultural activities and enterprises.

F. Strengthening sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics

45. Significant gaps exist in the data and statistics available on rural women and girls across the themes covered in this report. Therefore, improving the collection, analysis, and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender in rural areas is critical in order to increase our collective understanding and address the key gaps and challenges that rural women and girls face.

46. Member States are taking steps to identify and address these gaps across sectors. In Jordan, the Department of Statistics has updated the national health sector database and is preparing comprehensive sex-disaggregated data documenting the improvement in the situation of women, including rural women, and their rights. In Sri Lanka, the Department of Census and Statistics is concerned that sex-disaggregated data covering land tenure, energy, water and sanitation are not available since records are kept in the husband's name as head of household. The State of the Filipino Women Report 2016 of the Philippines documents the status of land ownership and land holding by sex. In Argentina, the Ministry of Agro-industry through the Rural Change Unit incorporates sex-disaggregated data into all programme design and delivery. A study is being conducted in three provinces to obtain data for a gender analysis of rural property.

47. A number of countries are continuing to collect time-use data that will help to address the disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work performed by rural women and girls, among other issues. The National Survey on Time Use in 2014 collected information on specific activities in localities of fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, which can be categorized as rural. In 2017 in Mongolia, the National Statistical Office is collecting data on "Women's health and life experience" with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. In 2015, the third "time usage" survey was organized, and a pilot survey on measuring individual asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective was conducted, supported by UNFPA and the Asian Development Bank. In Switzerland, the census of agricultural enterprises collected sex-disaggregated data for the first time in 2013, including on management and ownership of the farm, training of the husband/wife of the farm manager, paid activities on- and off-farm, and social coverage for all persons over 15 years of age living on the farm.

48. FAO is providing guidance and standards for the collection of sex-disaggregated data in the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020. The "Voices of the Hungry" project uses a novel approach to collect nationally representative food insecurity data at the individual level, thus enabling disaggregation by sex of respondents. FAO is also developing guidelines on "Mainstreaming Sex-Disaggregated Data and Gender Indicators in Agricultural Statistics", to be released in 2017.

49. The Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project is a joint initiative of the United Nations Statistics Division and UN-Women, together with national statistical offices, regional commissions and international agencies, that seeks to improve the integration of gender issues into the regular production of official statistics for better, evidence-based policies. The project is aimed at accelerating existing efforts to generate internationally comparable gender indicators on health, education, employment, entrepreneurship and asset ownership, including in rural areas.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

50. Member States and United Nations entities have implemented measures to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas, expanding their access to quality education and health care, decent work and entrepreneurship and infrastructure and technology. They have also taken steps to eliminate violence and discrimination against rural women and girls and to strengthen the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on rural areas. Despite considerable progress in some respects, most women and girls in rural areas worldwide fare worse than rural men and urban women for every gender and development indicator for which there is data available. The challenges that rural women and girls face have been magnified by the pace and complexity of globalization, urbanization, migration and climate change, among other processes.

51. In the light of the multiple and intersecting identities of rural women and girls and the inequalities that they face, support for the full and equal participation of rural women in decision-making at all levels is necessary for the creation of more transparent and accountable institutions, improved and responsive governance and the realization of the rights of rural women and girls. This will entail greater coordination between national gender equality mechanisms and other governmental and non-governmental institutions and civil society organizations at all levels.

52. While countries are beginning to report progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, better targeted approaches and more focused investment across goals and targets will be necessary to ensure the inclusion of rural women and girls. Rural women and girls are central to achieving virtually all the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet they will be left behind if their needs, priorities and rights are not taken fully into account. In particular, more robust and more nuanced research and data are needed to understand and address the specificities of gender gaps and inequalities in rural areas and to support rural women and girls and their organizations to realize their rights and well-being.

53. Member States are encouraged to implement the following recommendations, presented for consideration by the General Assembly, to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas:

(a) Take action on existing commitments to rural development and the realization of rural women's and girls' empowerment and human rights, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, taking note of general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its 20-year global review (E/CN.6/2015/3), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development as an integrated framework that leaves no rural women or girls behind;

(b) Enact economic and social policies to eradicate poverty and support productive livelihoods in rural areas, paying particular attention to the needs of rural women and girls and the challenges that they face;

(c) Promote the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in rural development, governance and decision-making at all levels, by coordinating national gender equality mechanisms and other governmental and non-governmental institutions and civil society organizations at all levels;

(d) Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure full and equal participation and completion of quality education (primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and technical) for rural women and girls, including through quality teacher training, recruitment and retention, especially of women teachers in rural areas, and building gender-sensitive education facilities that provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;

(e) Increase financial investments in quality, affordable and universally accessible health-care facilities, practitioners and support services for women and girls in rural areas, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights;

(f) Take measures to reduce maternal mortality rates in rural areas, and increase rural women's access to quality care before, during and after childbirth;

(g) Strengthen the prevention, treatment and care of infections such as HIV in rural areas, including by providing comprehensive and far-reaching information services and social care infrastructure to reduce the disproportionate share of care falling on rural women and girls;

(h) Accelerate efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence, discrimination and harmful practices against rural women and girls, including domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting;

(i) Ensure rural women's full and equal rights to land and inheritance, land tenure security, common property and common resources and equal access to justice and legal support, by designing, reforming and enforcing relevant laws and policies;

(j) Ensure equal access to decent work in agricultural and non-farm sectors, including in sustainable enterprises and cooperatives; design and implement gender-responsive social protection, including conditional cash transfers; and facilitate the entry of young rural women into the labour force by improving their skills and capacities through technical and vocational training;

(k) Make procurement laws and policies gender-responsive and build the capacities and skills of rural women and their enterprises and cooperatives to benefit from public and private sector procurement processes;

(l) Mitigate post-conflict situations and impacts of climate change by ensuring rural women's full participation and decision-making in natural resource governance and building climate resilience;

(m) Support rural women and girls, and women smallholder farmers in particular, by investing in time- and labour-saving infrastructure and

technology, including sustainable energy, clean water and safe sanitation and information and communications technologies;

(n) Increase the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant institutions to collect, analyse and disseminate sex- and age-disaggregated data and produce gender statistics, including through agricultural censuses, to support policies and action to improve the situation of rural women and girls and monitor and track implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

54. The United Nations system and other international organizations, while supporting the empowerment of rural women and girls in their programmes and strategies, are encouraged to support Member States to implement, measure and monitor the foregoing recommendations at all levels.